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Continuing Latin Notes

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ANCIENT BATTLESHIPS

By LIONEL COHEN

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There is no more fascinating story in the world than the tale of the ancient ship. Even from the meagre records handed down to us, we can derive a faint glimpse of the struggle and hardships that confronted the early navigator. We can see in the lines of Homer the battle of man to control the elements, where pure muscle aided by stout fir oars fought wave and wind, often with disastrous results. The pages of Thucydides and others give us a different and more tragic picture—the struggle of man against man for control of the water, a picture lurid with the cries of helpless rowers when, trapped between decks, they plunge to instantaneous death; or when an enemy vessel shears their oars and by the impact drives each oar-handle into each rower's body. Our story reeks with sweat and blood and death; but it has its redeeming features as well. A many-oared warship racing along under oar and sail must have been a beautiful sight, a sight that any lover of the sea could well appreciate.

Over four thousand years ago battleships were in use among the ancient Egyptians, fairly large vessels fully equipped with sails and oars. Later, ships of war were employed by the ancient Cretans to strengthen their rule over the nearby islands. The Achaeans, immortalized in the Homeric poems, had lean swift ships in which they raced along the coasts, plundering coast towns. As time passed, these early ships were constantly enlarged and improved. New devices were added, until finally after over five hundred years of experimenting, this long evolution culminated in the famous Athenian triremes of the fifth and later centuries.

Before the trireme came into existence, ships had achieved considerable size; the warships of the sixth century already carried as many as fifty rowers. Moreover they were equipped with the ram, that famous ancient weapon which was as essential to the ancient battleship as cannon are to our modern man-of-war. The ram was merely a huge metal-shod point projecting from the front of the vessel at the waterline. When an enemy vessel was struck by this ram, it was literally scuttled, for the sharp point would tear a gaping hole in its side.

The early ships, then, carried the ram (*embolos*, *rostrum*) the huge point to puncture the enemy's hull. But something more was needed; power was necessary to drive this point with crushing force. The fifth century Greeks answered this need by building a ship manned by a huge number of rowers, the trireme. The problem of just how the rowers were arranged in these vessels has always puzzled scholars; the literature on this subject alone is immense. For years it was thought that there were three banks or rows of rowers, one above the other. This theory has lately been abandoned,

and scholars today generally agree that the trireme was arranged like the Venetian "a zenzile" galleys of the Middle Ages. Each rower worked one oar. The rowers were arranged in groups of three—three rowers on one bench, working their oars through one porthole. A trireme carried a hundred and seventy rowers, thus giving about twenty-five groups along a side. The rest of the crew was made up of emergency rowers, usually thirty.

We have considered the motive power of the trireme; let us turn to the ship itself. It should be noted that the following description does not refer specifically to the fifth-century triremes. Our information is so scanty that we must use all ancient references to get even a rough picture. Undoubtedly over the course of centuries the trireme must have varied considerably.

The ancients built their war vessels on slim, graceful lines. The average trireme was probably around a hundred and twenty-five feet in length, and a mere sixteen to seventeen feet at its widest portion. Since it was beached every night, its keel (*tropis*, *carina*) was made of stout oak to withstand the wear and tear of scraping along the sand. From either side of the keel the ribs (*statumina*, *stamina*, *costae*) curved upward and outward, strengthened by cross-beams (*zyga*, *transtra*). Upon them thin planks of fir or pine were placed. The vessel's front (*prora*) was strengthened with bulwarks (*epotides*), and to it the huge bronze-shod ram was fitted. Both ends of the ship rose into graceful arcs, the stern (*prymna*, *puppis*) being topped by an elaborate ornament (*aphlaston*, *aplustre*). The rowers sat on benches even with the side of the hull. Over their heads ran a hurricane-deck that covered the whole of the boat. In Latin a vessel having such a deck is called a *navis constrata*; one without such a deck, a *navis aperta*. Marines were carried on this deck. On the early vessels, the distance from the edge of the hull up to the deck was left open. In this type of ship (*aphraktos*) the rowers were unprotected. On a ship of the later type (*kataphraktos*, *navis tecta*), this distance was usually fenced in to afford protection to the rowers from both heavy seas and enemy darts.

The ancient rower used no oarlocks. His oar rested against a wooden pin (*skalmos*), to which it was loosely bound by a leather thong (*tropoter*). The thong kept him from losing his oar when heavy seas wrested it from his grasp. If the side of the vessel was fenced in, his oar passed through a porthole, the space about it being kept watertight by a leatheren bag (*askoma*).

Much of the equipment that our modern ships have, the ancient trireme possessed as well. It carried two anchors (*ankyrai*, *ancorae*) usually of lead, cork lifebuoys, a ship's boat, a national flag, signal flags, lights, a sounding lead for testing the water's depth, ladders (*klimakes*, *scalae*), and gangways (*apobathrai*, *pontes*) for landing—even water-pumps to pump out bilge-water.

Two sails (*histia, vela*), one large and one small, were used to aid the rowers, each hoisted on its own mast (*histos, malum*). At times of combat, however, the large sail was left on shore and the small one stowed away in the boat and used only when the vessel was attempting to escape. Thus the expression "to hoist the small sail" came to mean "to run away." Sails were made of linen usually; the ropes that controlled them, of flax, hemp, papyrus fibres, and sometimes strips of hide. Two huge steering oars (*pedalia, gubernacula*) trailed from the rear; a handle connected them, enabling one steersman to guide the vessel on its course.

The sight of a fully-equipped trireme getting under way must have been impressive indeed. Athenian breasts must have filled with pride as they heard the familiar sounds of departure—the screech of ropes as the sails were hoisted on the mast and bellied before the wind, the tortured cry of wood rubbing against wood as one hundred and seventy rowers threw their weight on the oars, the even cry of the time-beater as he gave the beat to the rowers just as the coxswain on our modern racing crews, the hiss of the water as the sharp bronze of the ram bit into it, the rattle of the arms of the marines as they settled themselves on the deck, and lastly the groan of the heavy steering oars as they laid the vessel on its course once momentum was gained.

The added power that the trireme afforded was not enough for the ancient naval architect. He sought to create even larger and more powerful warships. And so the fourth, third, and second centuries B.C. saw the development of quadriremes, quinquiremes, and vessels of six-, seven-, eight-, nine-, ten-, eleven-, twelve-, thirteen-, fifteen-fold equipment—even forty-fold equipment, carrying as many as four thousand rowers! A mad race it was, in which each monarch sought to outdistance his rivals. Probably these large vessels marked a complete change from the trireme in construction. The old principle of one man to an oar must have been abandoned, and the practice adopted of putting many men on one oar. Thus we may assume that a *hexaris* had six men to an oar, a *heptaris* seven men to an oar, and so on. Fantastic as these ships must have been, they lasted some time; Antony still depended largely on them in the battle of Actium, 31 B.C. The famous Nike of Sarnothrace stands proudly on a replica of the bow of one of these vessels.

To continue the story of the battleship from this point, we must move westward, where Rome, for the first time, begins to figure in the naval history of the ancient world. The Punic wars were responsible for Rome's first real navies. Shipless, without naval experience, she toiled night and day, and finally produced a fleet that was more than a match for Carthage's highly-touted navy. The backbone of this fleet was the quinquireme, a shallow galley with five men working each oar. Three hundred men formed her normal crew, considerably larger than that of the trireme. Like the trireme, she carried two sails and a metal-shod ram. Unlike the trireme, her sides were always fenced in. Alongside these heavy dreadnoughts, some lighter vessels fought in the line—quadriremes, triremes, and a few small craft.

The crews of all these vessels consisted of rowers (*remiges*) and sailors (*nautae*), drawn from the allies, maritime colonies, and the *libertini*; and marine troops (*milites classici*), drawn from the Roman proletariat. In addition there was a captain (*magister navis*) and a helmsman (*gubernator*), both *ingenui*.

As their experience with the sea grew, the Romans turned to lighter varieties of craft. The number of heavy quinquiremes dropped and triremes came back into favor. At the beginning of the second century, *lembi* became a regular part of the fleet. These vessels carried no ram, but were more roomy than the regular warships and could carry a considerable number of fighting men. Later, in the first century B.C., a new type was added, destined to outstrip all the others in popularity—the swift, easily-manoeuvred Liburnian. The Liburnian had been used by the pirates of Illyria for years and

had been at its best against the slow-moving Roman quinquiremes. As the Liburnians appeared in the Roman fleets, they always carried a ram and usually two banks of oars. Octavian employed them with deadly effectiveness at the battle of Actium. Swift and small, they darted about and utterly crippled Antony's huge vessels by shearing off their oars.

The effectiveness of these light vessels rang the death-knell of the huge dreadnoughts. Though still built, they were so far surpassed in popularity by the lighter vessels that in late imperial times the term "Liburnian" came to mean little more than "warship." Liburnians and triremes made up the bulk of the fleets of the early empire.

Editor's Note: Teachers frequently write to the League for help in directing projects dealing with ancient ships. Mr. Cohen's article should prove very useful in such undertakings, as well as helpful in the planning of an occasional classical club program. High school boys are always interested in ships.

HAVE YOU TRIED THIS?

For some time the Greek Club of the Princeton (N. J.) High School has been attracting the attention of educators in the East. Greek is not one of the languages offered as part of the curriculum at Princeton High School; yet each year, as a result of the activities of the Greek Club, a group of young people leave the school equipped with more than a nodding acquaintance with the elements of the Greek language, and a deep-rooted love for Greek literature and art. Furthermore, among the students themselves the club is one of the most popular and respected organizations in the school. To Mr. Miles G. Thompson, teacher of Latin in the high school, goes the credit for this remarkable achievement. It is in the hope that the Princeton club may serve as an inspiration to other Latin teachers that the editor has requested Mr. Thompson to summarize the work of his organization.

A Greek Club

Five years ago, in the fall, when clubs were being formed in the Princeton High School, a group of fifteen young people who had enjoyed their Latin asked for a Greek club. They wanted to know a little Greek and to learn something of Greek art and the culture of classical days. The request was granted, and with these fifteen pupils a formal organization was started in the school. They wrote a constitution and elected a President, Vice-President, Secretary, and Treasurer. There is a club period in the Princeton High School, so the club meets once each week during the school term, in a Latin classroom where maps and pictures are available.

Each period some help is given in language study. The pupils use *An Introduction to Greek*, by Crosby and Schaeffer, as their text. They complete during the term ten or fifteen lessons, but the amount covered depends on the speed with which each pupil works. They write all exercises in ink and keep them in a notebook. They make covers for these, and each tries to get something attractive as well as original for his work. In these books some have Greek maps, a page of Greek stamps, drawings, pictures of Greek temples with descriptions in essay form, and clippings from newspapers pertaining to Greece. This year they have been given for their book a list of forty common Greek roots, with the original Greek words and an English derivative from each. They are asked to learn these to make their work useful in their English.

There is always some special feature at each meeting. They have slides of Greece, and one moving picture of a trip around Athens. A Vaphio cup may be shown, or rustic pipes, classical marbles, maps, or charts. If a pupil is studying Vergil, he scans some of the Iliad for his notebook. At the end of the year the club has a tea at which the notebooks are out for inspection. They invite their parents, the faculty of the school, and the members of the club of the previous year. The

tea is given in the library. The club members prepare and serve the refreshments. Last year they sent to a Greek store in Boston for candy made in Greece. For the entertainment of their guests they invited Mrs. Edward Lodholz from Philadelphia to show moving pictures of her travels in Greece.

Each year the club gives to the school library a book on some Greek theme. As occasion demands, the club has performed its obligations to our school community in ushering at plays or providing an assembly program.

This year there are eighteen members of the club. They seem to be enjoying their work and are getting some facts not given in the regular school curriculum. It is a pleasant task to serve as adviser of such a Greek Club.

—MILES G. THOMPSON

BOOK NOTES

The Odyssey of Homer. Rendered into English by Samuel Butler. Washington, D. C.: National Home Library Foundation. Sherman F. Mittell, Editor. 378 pp. 25c.

"The National Home Library Foundation," says a notice on the flyleaf of the volume, "was established in 1932 as a co-operative and non-profit making organization to promote the reading of good literature among our people, and to make the best books available to greater numbers of our population at a price within the reach of all." The familiar translation of Samuel Butler, with clear type and sturdy binding, at an amazingly low price.

The Time Element in the Aeneid of Vergil. By Raymond Mandra. Williamsport, Pa.: The Bayard Press. xxiii 256 pp.

A new study of the chronology of the action of the *Aeneid*. Dr. Mandra calculates the period of the adventures of Aeneas, from the fall of Troy to the subjection of the Rutulians, as ten years; and the period of the action of the *Aeneid* as three months. He believes Aeneas spent only five or six weeks in Carthage. The author pays particular attention to the evidence of astronomical and botanical references in the poem, and he enunciates a new "law of similes" which commands attention.

NIGHT OVER THE GREEK THEATRE AT TAORMINA

BY FRANCES REUBELT

Tulsa, Oklahoma

There rise the open arches and the row
Of slender columns of the ancient scene,
With Aetna's wraith-like plumes of smoke between.
Beneath, the sea's blue waves, each capped with snow.

Sit here in silence till the stars bend low.
From this world of today your senses wean.
See you the flash of jewel, golden sheen
Of crown? 'Tis now two thousand years ago.

Here sin and retribution stalk again.
Eternal right and wrong their dues are given.
Here Clytemnestra falls, with justice slain,
Orestes flees, by Hades' Furies driven.
Those cries are not Sicilia's winds at war!
Medea mounts there to her dragon-car.

A STRIKING TRIBUTE TO THE VALUE OF LATIN STUDIES

BY RAYMOND F. HAULENBECK

Barringer High School, Newark, N. J.

In the Averill High School at Hinckley, Maine, there is something which is of great interest to teachers and students of Latin. Many years ago, when he was still a boy, George W. Hinckley, at the cost of real hardship to himself, befriended an orphan boy who was suffering from neglect and

harsh treatment at the hands of a neighboring farmer. Hinckley even then determined to devote himself to the work of helping and educating orphans, and the result of that decision is the Good Will Home Association. Since 1889 this work has been growing, until it is one of the most remarkable institutions in America. One of its many subdivisions is the Averill High School.

When he reached the mellow afternoon of life, Mr. Hinckley looked back over his youth and came to the conclusion that the things which had been of the greatest value to him were the Bible, for the inspiration of character, and the study of Latin, especially of Vergil, for the discipline of the mind. He wished he could recover the books which had meant so much to his boyhood, and after much searching he found them, one in Rhode Island and one in New Jersey, for they had been given away and forgotten years before. A lighted niche was made for the old "Vergil" and the battered lexicon in the new Averill High School building, and the books are enshrined there beside a bust of the poet, presented by the alumni at the bimillennial celebration in 1930. There they may be seen as a perpetual monument to the value of the study of Latin.

JUNIOR CLASSICAL LEAGUE

Teachers from many states, whose students have enrolled in the Junior Classical League since our first announcement a few weeks ago, have raised questions as to the purpose and working of this organization. We must repeat that "entrance requirements" are left entirely at the discretion of the individual instructor. From the League's point of view the teacher need only confer upon such students as she may select the Junior Classical League pin, which still remains at thirty cents postpaid. However, the Junior League should not be set up with such arbitrary limitations as to hamper its use for the widest possible dissemination of interest in the Classics as a whole. For the primary purpose of the Junior Classical League is to band the youth of America together in the present emergency for the service of our common classical cause. To this end teachers are urged to send in with their orders the names of students concerned, so that proper recognition may be taken of meritorious work later on and future liaison be kept up. The following are some of the uses for which wide-awake teachers have thus far put the Junior Classical League in action: To encourage students in the lower grades who are not yet taking Latin. Those interested in Ancient History and Mythology, whether because of family training or personal initiative, have proved apt material. To constitute as it were a kind of "outer circle," with which as a smaller honorary group the Latin Club co-exists. Students willing to do missionary work for the Classics are especially desirable in this kind of project.

NEWS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

At a meeting held in Chicago on December 28-30, 1936, and attended by representatives of the regional classical associations it was decided to organize an Inter-Association Policies Committee with a view to securing better coordination of effort in combating certain educational tendencies hostile to classical studies. Professor A. Pelzer Wagner has been appointed to represent the Classical Association of the Middle West and South, Professor Russell M. Geer to represent the Classical Association of New England, Miss Mildred Dean to represent the Classical Association of the Atlantic States. As yet no representative has been appointed for the Classical Association of the Pacific States. The Chicago meeting was called by Professor Wagner, chairman of the Committee on the Present Status of Classical Education, a special committee appointed some two years ago by the Classical Association of the Middle West and South.

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The following items will prove helpful in connection with club projects. Please order by number.

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